

AWAY FROM MY “COMFORT ZONE”

“Go and preach to all nations.” (Mk.6: 7)

I did not expect that one day I would have the fortune of coming to Newark, New Jersey.

I graduated with a Theology degree from St. Vincent School of Theology, Quezon City in March 2004. Shortly after graduation, I went into deep discernment, asking God whether I should push through my application to the Archdiocese of Newark or just stay put and continue my seminary formation. With the encouragement of my BLD shepherd and ME25 classmates, I decided to send my application and was accepted! And so the preparation for my trip to New Jersey began and was in full swing in due time.

I arrived in this land of plenty on January 17, 2005. Coming to America, I had anticipated a brighter life, more fulfilling than what I had back home. But three days after my arrival I got sick with flu. I was hit with a terrible cold and the fever was making me weak. My body was perhaps shocked by the sudden change in temperature for I was freezing since the day I arrived. In my feverish condition, I was suffering physically and emotionally and was missing home. I remembered how back home, I would be well taken care of and nursed back to good health by relatives. I blamed myself for an erroneous decision to come to Newark.

Back home, I was already done with my Theology course and was in a pre-deaconal program. Also as a seminarian in a predominantly Catholic country, I have been enjoying a great sense of security and pride because people love the seminarians and have a high regard for priests. These thoughts continued to upset me and made my sickness worse. I was confused and lonely. I was indeed at the point of giving up. I prayed to God for enlightenment and for a deeper faith. There and then, I realized that my sickness was part of my journey- my journey for the Lord. I thought of the first disciples who dared preach the Gospel to all nations in the midst of winter carrying nothing but relied solely in the Divine Providence (cf. Mk.6: 8ff). Realizing that, I regained the fervor of committing myself to the service of God’s people here in Newark.

I trust that whatever challenge I will encounter here in America, as long as I let God work in me, I can hurdle it. A genuine vocation to follow Christ means the willingness to accept the challenges along the way and be ready to leave behind one’s ‘comfort zone’. The cross-cultural experience might be tough and difficult, but I am ready.